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CONTACT: Amanda Kraus, 503-986-1074

Amanda.Kraus@oregonlegislature.gov

Oregon Senate Passes Suite of Bills to Improve Public Safety and Police Accountability

SALEM – The Oregon Senate has passed a variety of measures this week to enhance equity, increase public safety and improve police accountability in Oregon communities. These bills are key priorities of the Legislature’s BIPOC Caucus and reflect Oregon Senate Democrats’ commitment to strengthen laws around policing to provide greater transparency, community safety and inclusion.

[House Bill 3059](#) passed the Senate unanimously on Tuesday, June 1. The bill adds clarity in how to address an “unlawful assembly.” House Bill 3059 seeks to provide protections against police abusing their powers and gives police bureaus flexibility in determining whether to arrest individuals engaged in non-violent protest at the point that an “unlawful assembly” is declared.

“The need for this legislation has become clear as a result of the racial justice protests over the last year, which exposed many impracticalities in our law related to ‘unlawful assemblies,’ resulting in escalated tensions and violence,” said Senator Michael Dembrow (D-Portland). “It’s more useful for law enforcement to focus on those encouraging violence or carrying out violent acts.”

On Wednesday, the Oregon Senate passed [House Bill 2929](#). This bill requires law enforcement officers who witness violations or misconduct by fellow police officers to report the violation to a supervisor to whom the officer directly reports, who is part of the officer’s chain of command or is a member of the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST). The bill passed 27-2.

“When officers are out in the field, situations can change quickly,” said Senator James I. Manning Jr. (D-Eugene) a former law enforcement officer. “What shouldn’t change is officers’ pride in serving their community, the integrity of their work and their willingness to demonstrate the guts it takes to do the right thing. When an officer witnesses a colleague or supervisor doing otherwise – committing an act of misconduct or another violation – that officer should be empowered to report those violations. Law enforcement must hold one another to the highest standard.”

On June 2, [House Bill 2986](#) passed the Oregon Senate with a unanimous vote. The bill directs the Board on Public Safety Standards and Training to ensure law enforcement officers are adequately trained to investigate, identify and report crimes which were motivated by prejudice based on gender or perceived gender. Officers are already required to be trained on crimes motivated by other protected classes.

“Violence and assault against transgender and gender non-conforming individuals has been increasing,” said Senator Sara Gelser (D-Corvallis), who carried House Bill 2986. “In addition, we cannot diminish the significance of gender-based crimes and we must address the root causes of those crimes and seek justice.”

[House Bill 3164](#) provides clarity around the ways in which an individual could be charged with Interfering with a Police Officer, commonly known as “IPO”. The goal of this legislation is to ensure when law enforcement arrests civilians it is justified and journalists are able to accurately report on issues on-the-ground. This will encourage consistency in the application of the statute and make the law easier to follow and understand. House Bill 3164 passed 17-12 on Wednesday, June 2.

“The current IPO statute has been misused,” said Senator Lew Frederick (D-N/NE Portland). “Those who are charged with this ambiguously defined crime are disproportionately Oregonians of color and houseless individuals. In its current status, the IPO law exacerbates disparities, HB 3164 should help remedy that problem.”

On Thursday, June 3, Senator Sara Gelser (D-Corvallis) carried [House Bill 2513](#) to passage on a 24-4 vote. The bill requires the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training to provide airway anatomy and physiology training in addition to CPR training. House Bill 2513 includes ongoing education and certification requirements for police officers and requires law enforcement to call emergency medical service providers immediately when an individual is suffering from cardiac or respiratory compromise.

“Regardless of whether a person is under arrest, emergency care should never be delayed,” said Senator Gelser. “It is critical that law enforcement personnel immediately summon emergency medical services when a person is in medical distress. In addition, each officer must understand the anatomy of the human body to better recognize signs of distress and better understand how their own actions could put the life of another at risk. Ensuring these officers are fully trained to handle these situations and are compelled to act immediately will save lives and prevent unnecessary injury.”

[House Bill 3355](#), sponsored by Senator Manning, specifies what identification must be visible on law enforcement officers’ uniforms and equipment during protests and other crowd management situations. House Bill 3355 also requires law enforcement to provide their name, identification number or a business card to the public upon request. The bill applies to crowd management in cities with a population of 60,000 or more. The Senate passed HB 3355 yesterday on a 22-5 vote.

“If you are acting above board, you should feel comfortable having your name on display, you shouldn’t feel like you need to hide,” said Senator Manning. “As a member of the public, it’s important that you know *who* you are interacting with. It builds trusts, and a sense of common humanity. That’s key to successful community and law enforcement relations.”

Chief among the goals of police accountability and reform is ensuring those charged with protecting and serving their communities hold anti-racist values. [House Bill 2936](#) adds social media policy and a

standardization of background checks created by DPSST for law enforcement units for use during the hiring process. The bill passed 20-8 in the Oregon Senate yesterday.

“We have known many law enforcement officers – the very individuals we expect to protect us and who I have served alongside – are incredibly dedicated to safety, community and the law,” said Senator Manning. “Unfortunately, we keep learning about some officers’ ties to hate groups. We’ve seen examples of bigoted speech on the internet and social media by law enforcement officers as well. Hate groups and hate speech are never acceptable, and it blocks Oregonians of color from feeling as though they can count on our men and women in uniform to protect them equally. We need to get ahead of allowing these individuals to join law enforcement and have officers who are truly interested in protecting and serving all people.”

House Bills 3059, 2929, 2986, 3164 and 2513 now go to Governor Kate Brown for final approval. House Bills 3355 and 2936 were amended in the Senate and now go to the House of Representatives for concurrence.

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